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ABSTRACT

In 1993, the Missouri Legislature passed the Outstanding Schools Act, providing funding to create nine regional professional development centers (RPDC's) throughout Missouri. The goal was to create a decentralized, responsive model for supporting public schools in meeting the Act's mandates and to offer natural links between teacher education programs, public schools, and the state department of education. In 1995-1996, Central Missouri State University and the Central RPDC planned the Central Teachers' Academy. The Academy's mission emphasized the belief that to change their own work and professional lives, teachers must seek deeper understanding of educational change and current issues emerging out of change. In 1996, 19 teachers from 12 school districts became the Academy's first class. The 13-month program included monthly informational meetings regarding school reform and an action research project by each teacher. After a 3-day retreat that included team-building activities, monthly meetings provided professional development in various areas. The action research component was integrated into the monthly meetings, and three additional meetings allowed for peer discussion and interaction concerning each member's action research. Informal evaluations at the end of the program indicated that the Academy was helpful in promoting positive change in teachers' classroom behavior. Descriptions of the Teachers' Academy, calendar of events, an application form, a letter, and a member reflection are appended. (SM)

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ED 412 192

The Teachers' Academy: A Collaborative Approach to Preparing Teachers for Leadership Roles in the Public Schools

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A paper presented at the 1997
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The Teachers' Academy: A Collaborative Approach to Preparing Teachers for Leadership Roles in the Public Schools.

HISTORY BEHIND THE ACADEMY

The Missouri Legislature passed "The Outstanding Schools Act" in 1993. Contained within this sweeping educational reform legislation were mandates that teachers become the decision-makers in determining the planning and funding of professional development. Concomitantly, with the mandate was the requirement that all public school districts in Missouri expend a minimum of one percent of their state provided funds for professional development.

The school districts would also be held accountable for implementing many aspects of newly created performance standards and authentic assessment models. This created a unique and challenging leadership dilemma. Teachers now were mandated to make decisions that would have long-term implications for their district, yet many teachers serving on the professional development committees had limited opportunity to engage in discussions and receive information concerning the reform initiative at the national and state level.

However, The Outstanding Schools Act did provide funding to create nine regional professional development centers (RPDC) throughout the state of Missouri with a specific mission to assist the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education with implementing all aspects of "The Outstanding Schools Act" as well as other department needs. Each RPDC would serve the school districts in a given geographical area. The goal was to provide a more decentralized and responsive model for supporting public schools in meeting the mandates of "The Outstanding

Schools Act." The RPDCs were also to provide a natural linkage between teacher education programs, the public schools and the state department, thus providing a higher likelihood of simultaneous reform.

ACADEMY FORMATION

In 1995-1996 Central Missouri State University and the Central Regional Professional Development Center began planning for the formation of The Central Teachers' Academy. The Academy's mission is grounded in the belief that in order to be in charge of their own work and professional lives, teachers must seek deeper understandings of educational changes and the current issues and practices that emerge as part of change. This level of understanding will then allow teachers to serve as knowledgeable change agents in their school districts. A secondary purpose of the Academy was to facilitate the creation of a network of outstanding teachers. Administrators in geographic regions have always formed collaborative networks for mutual benefit. With teachers taking more of a curriculum leadership role in their schools, it is essential that networks be established to support this new leadership role.

The intent and process of The Teachers' Academy is very congruent with existing research regarding educational change and teacher empowerment. The process of collaboration among the different agencies responsible for public education is also coherent with the existing research and thought regarding school reform. Reformers can speak of school reform easily, but the reality of true change in schools will only be accomplished if teachers and building level administrators are provided

time for professional collaboration. The Central Teachers' Academy provides such a structure.

In January, 1996 a university professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction was provided release time to work with the RPDC to develop, organize and solicit teachers to apply for the Academy. The Central Teachers' Academy solicited applications in the Spring, 1996 and accepted 19 teachers from 12 school districts to serve as the first Academy class. Assistance was provided from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the St. Louis Teachers' Academy. This team of four (university, state, regional professional development center and the St. Louis Academy) allowed for a well planned beginning.

School districts were allowed to nominate one or more teachers from their district to become involved in this thirteen month project. The teachers nominated are required to have demonstrated a commitment to professional growth and leadership within their district. They would then be provided release days by their district to attend monthly meetings and retreats with similar teachers (see application forms and flyers). In addition, the district would pay a tuition of $500 for each teacher participating.

The Academy is a thirteen month program of intellectual and professional challenge within a context of strong collegial interaction and support. The program has two major components; 1) monthly informational meetings regarding areas of school reform and reorganization and 2) an action research project to be completed by each participant. Both activities afford teachers the opportunity to inquire into and inform their own practice in order to positively effect the quality

of student learning and to provide guidance and support to school improvement issue in their home district.

THE ACADEMY EXPERIENCE

The Academy experience began with a three day retreat a lake resort area. This was a collaborative venture as the St. Louis area Teachers' Academy provided guidance in organizing the retreat. The St. Louis Teachers' Academy has been in existence for over eight years.

A "get acquainted" social was held the first evening of the retreat. This allowed the teachers to meet and interact with both their home Academy colleagues and those from the St. Louis Academy. The next day morning meeting allowed all participants to hear presentations by national consultants in the area of school reform and teacher efficacy.

The afternoons allowed each Academy to meet separately and develop the Academy experience. A fundamental philosophy of the Academy is that the membership have complete control in developing the activities and areas of study. The Academy facilitator has the responsibility to organize, coordinate and implement the group's wishes. Therefore, this meeting consisted of team building activities and then a process of brain storming and consensus building concerning the activities and events of the year. At the end of the process, the facilitator asked for flexibility to sequence some activities based on which speakers, workshops or site visits would be available at given dates (a calendar of events can be found in the attached documents).

The final day of the retreat allowed the both Academy members to hear presentations from last year's St. Louis Academy graduates. Several

members shared the process and product of their action research. Others shared their experiences with the outdoor retreat component. That final afternoon, each Academy met separately to review and revised the calendar of events and to begin the process of defining an action research topic.

Starting in September the Central Teachers' Academy met approximately once a month. Sometimes as part of a larger staff development workshop and at times specific activities for the Academy only. In October, an two day outdoor retreat was held. The members engaged in team building, leadership style analysis and a day's worth of outdoor experiences focusing on professional/personal and organizational change. This experience proved crucial in breaking down personal barriers and allowed the Academy to become a tight cohesive group of friends willing to take risks in front of one another.

The action research component of the Academy was integrated into the monthly meetings. However, based on the need of the membership, three additional meetings were held during the evening throughout the year. These meetings were called "scholars night." The meetings lasted approximately three hours and allowed for discussion and peer interaction concerning each member's action research plan and progress.

The culminating event was a graduation celebration held in June. The graduate shared growth experiences and celebrated the process. Action research papers were not due at this meeting but they were discussed. Academy members will complete the action research papers by August 1997. Evaluations were also done at this time. The evaluations and celebration events were facilitated by an Academy member that had

been selected to facilitate the 1997-98 Academy.

THE FUTURE OF THE ACADEMY

The graduation celebration was also the transition of the Academy to become a practitioner driven model. The university personnel's role will now shift to that of action research consultant only. The new school-based facilitator will be provided a stipend to coordinate the 97-98 Academy. The home district of the new facilitator will also be allowed to send a teacher to the 97-98 Academy at no cost. This is in exchange for the cost of substitutes for the days the facilitator will be gone.

In 1996-97, only two areas in the state had a Teachers' Academy. Several areas (usually associated with the Regional Professional Development Centers) had sent representatives to some of the joint meetings. The Central Teachers' Academy and the St. Louis Academy both had a participant that would be the facilitator in another region the following year.

It appears that the state will have four or five regional Teachers' Academies for the 1997-98 class. This will allow opportunity for collaborative meetings and a more efficient use of funds to obtain national consultants. In additional to this positive growth, it appears that the Teachers' Academies will continue to integrate some functions with the state-supported Leadership Academies (used to support and develop individuals relatively new to school leadership roles).

ACADEMY EVALUATION

The 1996-97 Academy was done as a pilot. Evaluations were done in

a very informal and qualitative manner. At various points throughout the year open-ended evaluation/feedback forms were given to the membership. In general, most indicated that the Academy experience rated as one of the best professional growth experiences they had ever had. Although, many had indicated anxiety at the beginning concerning the action research component, in the end they concluded it too was a good growth experience that will result in a positive change in their classroom behavior (teacher comments in document section).

A FACILITATOR'S PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

As a facilitator, I had a specific job of building team and consensus among the Academy. I also became an insider and it is impossible to separate my leadership from my team membership. As the team developed into a mature learning community the leadership role of the facilitator was absorbed by the community itself. Individuals would make phone calls, set up meetings, bring specific expertise to the group as needed.

I experienced many of the same feeling and growth experiences as the Academy members. We laughed, cried, shared, struggled, and evolved. Teachers often spend the majority of their professional day isolated from their colleagues. It is one of the few professions in which collegial discussion and sharing is not built into the work week. Bringing talented teachers together from a variety of school settings without the normal threats (grades, evaluation, etc...) of a typical college course or district inservice provided for a more personal experience. If a community or district truly desires to promote instructional excellence and support the classroom teachers, the Academy model of collegial respect provides an avenue to such a journey.

Graduate Credit

An option of receiving 3 hrs. of graduate credit in Curriculum and Instruction is available to participants at a cost of approximately $190.00

Dr. Chris Belcher
Central Teachers' Academy
CMSU, Lovinger 300
Warrensburg, MO 64093

A Central RPDC Cadre of School Teachers

The teachers' Academy provides an intellectually stimulating and nurturing environment. Academy Fellows meet to achieve common professional goals. The Academy is a replication of the very successful Leadership Academy which had been fundamental in providing professional growth for school district administrators.

In the Academy, teachers engage in individual, action-based research. Each research project is designed by the participating teacher, supported by university mentors, and carried out within the teacher's own classroom setting. The results of the Fellows' research, published and available through The CRPDC professional library, provide a significant return to the profession.

In addition to individual research projects, Academy members collaborate with outside experts(such as Spencer Kagan, Robin Fogarty and others) to:

- Understand schools as organizations
- Influence the change process in schools
- Reflect on the teaching craft
- Ask questions and search for answers about current pedagogical concerns
- Identify specific challenges and areas for improvements
- Lead in school-based inquiries

Academy Participant --Proud to be Teachers

Each Academy Fellow will:

- Be a current classroom teacher
- Have demonstrated effectiveness in the classroom
- Have demonstrated potential for research and leadership
- Have five or more years teaching experience
- Have either a master's degree or significant involvement in professional growth activities

Priority will be given to teachers whose staff is currently involved in school reform.

The Academy year--Rewards & Commitments

Rewards for participating in the Academy are great. Academy teachers discover:

- Exceptional personal and professional growth
- Exposure to other scholars, to new situations, and to other education and business professionals
- Insights into the professional and themselves
- The excitement of generating new ideas
- The pride of giving something back
- The ability to use action research in reaching school goals

To achieve the aims of the Academy program, Fellows and their schools are asked to make a 15-month commitment to the program. Each Fellow also engages in individual action research which results in a collection of published studies for district and community use.

The Fellows program begins in August with a team building retreat, experiences that stresses personal and group challenges. At the retreat, Fellows also identify and prioritize current educational issues for study during their Academy year.

The Fellows schedule includes nine release days during the school year. Home districts of the Academy Fellows underwrite release time and tuition of $500 per participant. (actual co per participant exceeds $1000)

Recruiting & Choosing an Academy Class

The Academy welcomes applications from qualified classroom teachers--those who hav five or more years' experience and a masters degree, or evidence of sustained commitment t professional growth. Teacher teams representing all levels in a district are encouraged. Application forms give teachers chance to detail academic and professional experiences. All applications require two letters of recommendation, including one from an administrator as well as one from a fellow teacher. These recommendations should indicate evidence of the applicant's good standing in the district and the peer respect afforded the applicant.

Applications and letters of recommendation must be postmarked by May 7, 1997 and return to: Dr. Chris Belcher, Teachers Academy, CMSU, Lovinger 300, Warrensburg, MO 6409

A committee of STARR teachers will select Academy Fellows based on the applicant's qualifications and potential to contribute to t education community. The committee will strive to form an Academy class that is balanced for all grade levels and reflects the diversity of our area. Applicants will be notified by June 6, 1997. Selection to the Academy represents an honor both for Fellow and their districts.

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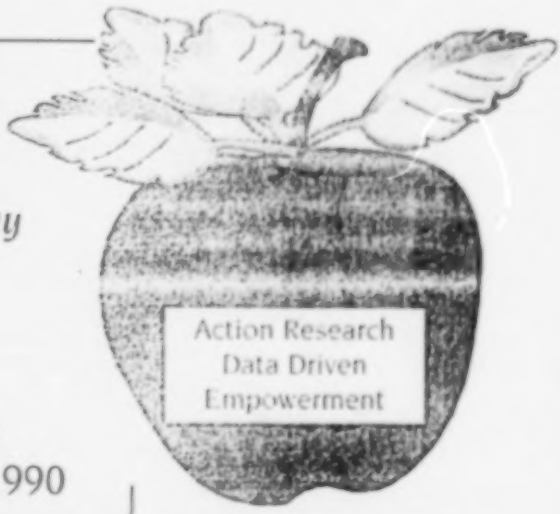
Teacher Empowerment Through the:

Central Regional Teachers Academy

What is Empowerment?

The opportunity and confidence to act upon one's ideas and to influence the way one performs in one's profession. True empowerment leads to increased professionalism as teachers assume responsibility for and involvement in the decision making process. – Melenyzer 1990



The Teacher Academy will provide practicing teachers the sophisticated knowledge base, the support, and collegial format by which they become truly empowered.

What matters most in school is what teachers know, believe and can do!

Teacher Empowerment occurs when a teacher has:

1. *Status*
2. *Professional growth*
3. *Efficacy*
4. *Autonomy*
5. *Involvement in decisions*
6. *Sense of impact on the school*

For information call 800-762-4146

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Central Teachers' Academy
Calendar of Events

August 14-16, 1996	Retreat - Lake of the Ozarks
September 23, 1996	Scholars Night - Heroes, Lee's Summit
September 24, 1996	Spencer Kagan - Cooperative learning and multiple intelligences. CMSU University Union 8:30-3:30
October 17-18, 1996	Outdoor Experience - Knob Noster State Park
November 12, 1996	Roger Taylor - Integrating the Curriculum. CMSU University Union 8:30-3:30. 3:30-5:30, Roger was able to visit with the Academy on Curriculum Compacting.
December 5, 1996	Scholars Night at RPDC, Warrensburg
December 6, 1996	Joan Caulfield - Brain Based Learning Models
February 2&3, 1997	Retreat at the Lake - Journey of School Improvement
February 21, 1997	Strategies for the At-Risk Learner Learning Exchange - Dr. Richard Sager
March 14, 1997	Earth Works, The Caves in Kansas City
April 14, 1997	Performance Based Instruction / Assessment 9:00-3:00 Professional Development Center 3:00-5:00 Scholars Night
May 8 & 9, 1997	Great Teaching in the One Computer Classroom
June 5, 1997	Final meeting at Heroes in Lee's Summit.

TEACHERS AS SCHOLARS

The Central Teachers' Academy

A Professional Fellowship for Master Teachers

Application Form

Date _____

Personal

Name _____

School District _____

Name/Grade Level of School _____

Work Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Work Phone _____ Home Phone _____

Optional

It would help us to select a diverse group of fellows if you would include this optional information.

Date of Birth _____ Race _____ Sex _____

Central Regional Professional Development Center

Academic History

Educational Institution(s) Attended	Major Field	Degree(s) Earned

Professional History

Name of School/District	Grade Level/ Content Areas	Years Taught

Applicant's Signature_____

Please include two letters of recommendation, one from a district administrator that indicates your good standing in the district, and one from a fellow teacher.

What do you hope to gain from your experience with the Teachers' Academy?

Is there anything else you feel we should know about you?

(Please turn the page)

What are the educational issues/challenges/questions that concern you in your classroom?

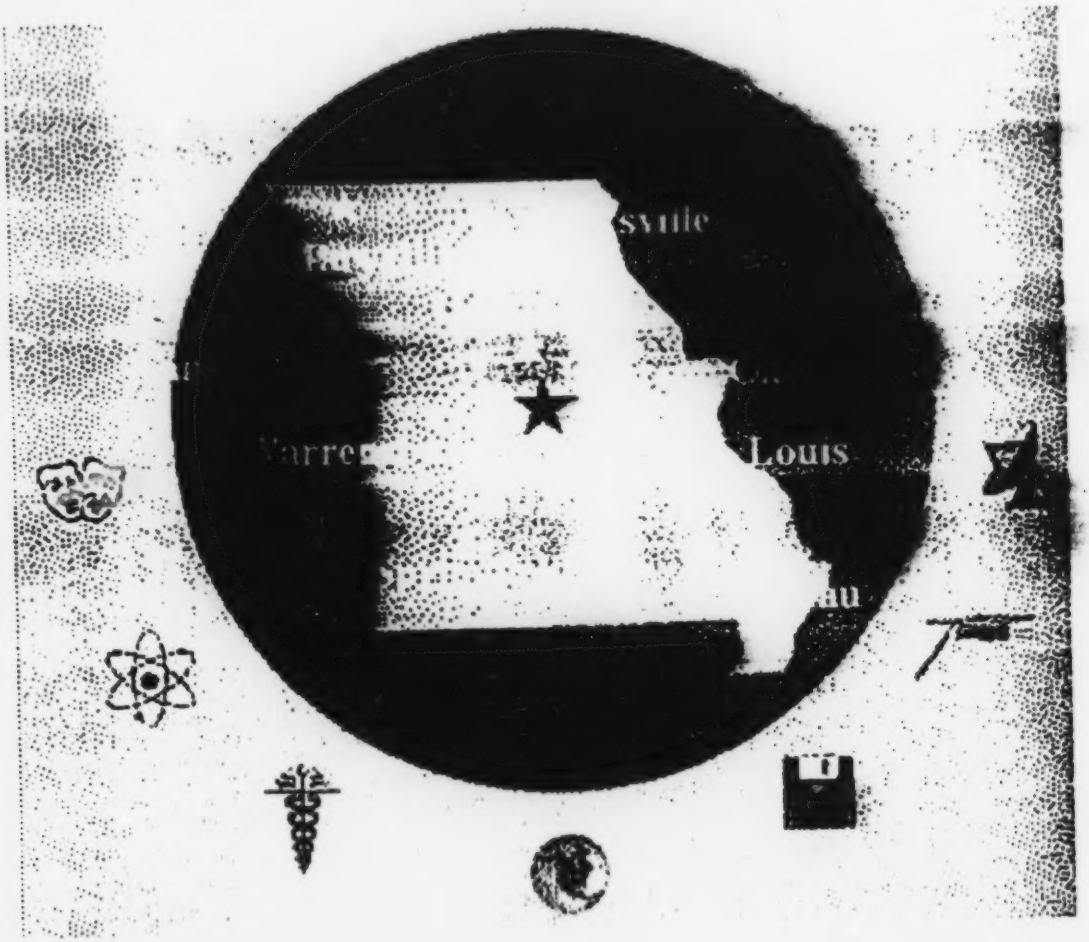
In what ways is your school currently involved in educational reform? Describe the role teachers, including yourself, are taking in that effort?

Describe one experience that excited and motivated you professionally in the last five years.

Please return by May 7, 1997 to:
Dr. Chris Belcher
The Teachers' Academy/CRPDC
CMSU, Lovinger 300
Warrensburg, MO 64093

All applicants will be notified by June 6. For more information, call Chris Belcher
816-543-8657 or 800-762-4146

Missouri Regional Professional Development Centers



What is an RPDC?

The Regional Professional Development Centers are learning communities established for the continuous growth of educators from recruitment to retirement. The centers are "safe harbors" where professionals as adult learners can share failures (learnings), successes, collect materials, take risks, grow, reflect, network and dialogue, as they struggle to make sustained improvements in practice. No longer are educators isolated and alone. The RPDCs should provide doorstep delivery of services that will not only improve an individual's performance but ultimately the performance of all students and staff.

Each center has a director who meets frequently with a local advisory board of practitioners who identify programs, projects, and goals for the center. The centers also play an important role in creating new alliances, partnerships with higher education, business, and other publics. One of the reasons that the centers are located on campuses of higher education is to provide higher education with assistance with pre-service education. The center is there to "grow the profession."

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How and why were the RPDCs created?

In recent years, the public has demanded greater accountability from teachers and administrators--more "proof" that they are adequately trained and academically competent. The enactment of the Outstanding School Act calls for sweeping educational reform efforts in Missouri. However, any efforts to improve or reform our schools must involve and ultimately depend on, the quality of our teachers and administrators. Building on the State Board of Education's efforts to improve the pre-service training for educators, the Outstanding Schools Act provides significant funding for professional development of Missouri's teachers and administrators. First, beginning in Fiscal Year 1994, each local school district must allocate one percent of the money received from the Foundation Formula to professional development activities at the local level. Second, beginning in Fiscal Year 1994, state level professional development moneys will be used to address statewide areas of critical need for learning and development and to disseminate information about successful professional practices and programs.

In order to facilitate coordinated professional development activities in the State and to provide networks for the exchange of successful practices, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education created nine Regional Professional Development Centers (RPDCs) in Missouri.

What do the RPDCs have to offer Missouri educators?

1. The Regional Professional Development Centers design and facilitate professional development activities for state educators teaching and school administration in the areas of:

- Programs that improve and enhance professional skills
- Current trends and practices in teaching and instruction
- Proven instructional models
- Successful management models
- Innovative programs
- Useful technology for education
- Provide training programs on such topics as the new state performance standards; implementation of school improvement and staff development plans; curriculum frameworks; enhancing leadership skills; school restructuring and accelerated learning such as Accelerated Schools and Re:Learning; opportunities for outstanding teachers to become part of the STARR project; and many more.

2. The RPDCs design and facilitate leadership training sessions for teachers, administrators, and human service providers that encourage educators and human service providers to work together toward creating quality schools that support children, youth, and family.

3. The RPDCs facilitate networks as support training to foster inter-district cooperative processing, collaborative planning, innovative practices in the development and implementation of staff development programs, and site and district staff development committees.

4. The RPDCs continue to establish a cadre of consultants that can provide technical assistance to school districts regarding state initiative's exemplary programs, strategic planning, providing and managing school based or school-linked service, leadership training, and statewide "areas of critical need" for learning and development.

5. The RPDCs develop cooperative projects with educational institutions and agencies to develop programs and practices which support and enhance the role of educators in supporting children, youth, and family.

6. Finally, the RPDCs provide instructional materials that can assist educators in producing quality materials for student instruction and adult learning and to help keep abreast of new professional practices.

There is an organizational chart of phone numbers and addresses for all nine Regional Professional Development Centers as well as State Initiatives contacts. Please call (573) 751-3963 to obtain a copy or look up our Regional Professional Development Center website at: http://oseda.missouri.edu:80/rpdc

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TO: Professional Development Committee Chairpersons, Superintendents, and Principals
FROM: Dr. Chris Belcher - Teachers' Academy Director
Central Regional Professional Development Consortium
DATE: March 28, 1996
RE: Teachers' Academy Information

I recently provided you with information about the Central Teachers' Academy. You may recall that this concept is driven by the belief that real change most often occurs at the grass roots level. Indeed, for true school reform to occur it must be designed, implemented, and revised by the classroom teacher. The Central Teachers' Academy is designed to nourish and support a district's teacher leaders so that they will be equipped to lead the reform movements in their schools. We are now ready to form the first class of The Central Teachers' Academy.

Many principals and superintendents have had the opportunity to participate in a similar program - The Leadership Academy. It has been hailed as an extremely successful model for empowering administrators with the knowledge and network ability to create school reform. Many states have now replicated The Leadership Academy model. With the passage of The Outstanding Schools Act, teachers have been mandated to serve in academic leadership roles in their districts. It is now imperative that teachers be exposed to the many issues concerning school reform.

It is the goal of the Central Teachers' Academy to facilitate a 15-month series of activities for teacher leaders which will meet their identified needs for district leadership. It is important to note that during the August retreat, the participants will create their own agenda for the Academy. If they indicate a need to learn more about performance assessment, then it will be my job to find an expert to bring in for a day or two to train and inform the Academy.

Several states have used this model with noted success. In our own state, the St. Louis Cooperating School Districts have eight years of experience with their Teachers' Academy. Central Regional Professional Development Center will join forces with the St. Louis group and several other Regional Professional Development Centers to create Teachers' Academies. The Academies will meet jointly about two times a year to share speakers and to develop professional networks among teachers.

We are now ready to get the Academy off the ground. I have enclosed a brochure for you to share with your staff. Although $500 and nine release days may seem steep, I would remind you that the participants will be exposed to national as well as state experts and will bring that information directly back to their home school district. The cost per participant easily exceeds $1000, so we consider this a great opportunity. I hope your district could send one or more teachers to join us in this journey. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to call at 816-543-8657 or the Central RPDC at 1-800-762-4146.

Teacher Academy Member Reflection

The teacher academy was one of the most meaningful professional development experiences I have participated in. I feel the action research project had a direct impact on my teaching practice because it had me look at my practices and examine what I was doing and how I could possibly improve. The relationships and support system that I developed as a result of becoming a participant were valuable tools I will use for many years to come.

Being a member of the Central Teachers' Academy team during the past school year was one of the most professionally fulfilling experiences of my 17 years of teaching. We were given the opportunity to hear nationally-known speakers, such as Dr. Spencer Kagan, Dr. Richard Sager, and Dr. Roger Taylor, who spoke on topiccs ranging from using cooperative learning to motivating at-risk students. We became more informed about brain-based research, authentic assessment, and National Board Certification. The Teachers' Academy allowed us the time and opportunity to be exposed to many of the current educational ideas and issues.

I think that any time you are involved with a group of highly professional educators, you strive to become more professional yourself. The Teachers' Academy motivated me to be the best educator that I could. As the year progressed, the members of our Academy became more unified and supportive of each other. We discussed educational problems and ideas. We shared information regarding our teaching styles and strategies. This information became very helpful in my classroom, because I would try different ideas that had been discussed. Not only did I use these ideas in my classroom, but I shared many of them with my fellow staff members. I was encouraged to speak to groups, both in and out of my district, about the experiences I had in the Academy.

I had a wonderful year in the Teachers' Academy. I would highly recommend being a part of the Teachers' Academy group to any experienced teacher who is open to new ideas and motivated by his/her career choice.